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## ADULT RECREATION AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

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The evolutionary origin of our race supplies the missing key to the conflicts between instinct and reason, between impulse and purpose, which were puzzling so long as man was supposed to have been turned off at a stroke by the Creator. Thanks to the evidence that our inborn tendencies established themselves as aids to survival under primitive conditions, Mencius' doctrine of the goodness of original human nature as well as Calvin's doctrine of its total depravity no longer present themselves as horns of an unescapable dilemma. Far from being a simple, consistent thing, man's nature appears to be a tangled skein. Besides very old tendencies which he shares with all mammals, and later ones which he inherits with the apes from their common ancestors in the Tertiary era, man has tendencies which have struck root only in the course of the thousands of centuries since he stood erect.

Very quickly is this human nature overlaid and hidden by the training that fits us for our civilized and social life. Learned responses, acquired habits, the clipping and pruning to make ourselves acceptable, so mask our original tendencies that they are soon hard to make out. For knowledge of them we must observe children in a state of freedom or adults in their self-revealing moments—that is, when they are off their guard, distraught, dreaming, diverting themselves, projected suddenly into a strange situation, or meeting a crisis, when they act quickly and from the subconscious.

Since our original tendencies—let us say *instincts*, for short—proceed neither from the hand of the Creator nor from a “fall” in the Garden of Eden, it is idle to try to make them out as inherently good or bad. Every one of them, during the process of its acquire-

ment, was an aid to survival and therefore was good. But, owing to the grip of heredity, an instinct may outlast the wild life in which it was serviceable. Within the brief historic period the conditions of living have so immensely changed that more than one of man's original tendencies have become a handicap to its possessor or a menace to society. In our present stage, for example, the teasing, tormenting, and bullying impulses make trouble and should be curbed; while, for the sake of social peace, the fighting impulses must be guided into safe channels. The latter-day doctrine that every natural tendency is good is as wide of the truth as the venerable dogma of original sin.

Generally the instincts which do not appear to be grinding anybody's grist have been given a bad name. In the primitive instincts the moralists have perceived the roots of the great vices. Parents are exasperated by the impish and mischief-making bent of their children. Teachers, clergymen, employers, magistrates, and drillmasters—in a word, the whole corps of man-tamers—find themselves continually baffled by the waywardness of human nature. Efficiency is ever being tripped up by man's inborn restlessness, *wanderlust*, gregariousness, self-assertiveness, or thirst for excitement. It is these traits that hinder people from living according to some pattern held up to them—the sage's "life of reason," the saint's "godly life." So that all that is authoritative in ourselves or in society has sought to repress the instincts in the interest of rational purpose.

Worse yet, prophets have often sharply opposed mind and body and stigmatized the propensities of the latter as base and brutish. It is only the soul that strives for the good, the true, and the beautiful. Natural appetites, impulses, and inclinations, being of the flesh, should be brought under. Hence ethical and religious systems have frequently apexed in a morbid asceticism, condemning comfort, pleasure, laughter, and play, and idealizing fasting, vigils, celibacy, silence, solitude, and poverty.

In the light of our present knowledge of man, "mortifying the body" ranks in senselessness with human sacrifice and witch-baiting. The peoples which have gone the farthest in smothering the instincts are marked by passivity and weakness. What a

contrast between the ancient Greeks, with their ideal of temperance, and the modern Hindoos, who, intent on strengthening the spiritual nature at the expense of the animal nature, seem really to have squandered their vitality! The truth is that—to quote Graham Wallas—“we cannot in St. Paul’s sense ‘mortify’ our dispositions. If they are not stimulated, they do not therefore die, nor is the human being what he would be if they had never existed. If we leave unstimulated, or, to use a shorter term, we ‘baulk,’ any one of our main dispositions, Curiosity, Property, Trial and Error, Sex, and the rest, we produce in ourselves a state of nervous strain.”

The ascetic frenzy is passing, but meanwhile the work side of life has turned ascetic and appeals less and less to man’s native tendencies. The case was bad enough when, a few thousands of years ago, hunting failed him and in tilling the soil he first made his acquaintance with drudgery. Then began the elimination of the laziest and the invention of whips to drive men through unstimulating tasks. But the husbandman, working with growing things out of doors and in touch with domestic animals, is a glad child of nature compared with the modern factory-worker, feeding metal plates to a punching machine for ten hours a day.

The grind of business, on the other hand, is relieved by situations which stir the hunting, emulative, fighting, or constructive instincts. The man with a prospering enterprise of his own usually finds zest in running it and hates to have to take the salaried post offered him by the trust that absorbs his concern. The fact that the phraseology and mental imagery of typical business men are saturated with pictures borrowed from the chase and the fight reveals why so many remain in business long after they are able to retire, and why they are so loath to admit that business should be a form of social service and not a game.

The professions appeal less to the cave man in us, though, to be sure, the trial lawyer tastes the joy of battle, the preacher may think of himself as wrestling with Satan, while the engineer may delight in besting snowslide or quicksand. If on the whole they are less piquant than business and speculation, the professions offer the excitement of variety and uncertainty, put intermittent strains on the attention, and set problems which stimulate curiosity and

the instinct of workmanship. Unlike the maker of the fiftieth part of a pin, the professional man feels the elation that comes from following a job right through to the anticipated end.

It is a pity that no one has ever methodically dissected the occupations to determine how much we relish them from instinct, how much from transferred interest, and how much they go against our grain. No doubt an investigator would discover startling contrasts. Children react to callings without heed to their pay or social grade, and the boy's naïve ambition to be a scout, a sleuth, a teamster, or a locomotive engineer gives a clue to the reaction of the primitive self. At the same time, this self appears to be lynx-eyed in detecting in dull-looking situations material for thrills. The same golden make-believe that in childhood transforms playfellows into bears and Indians saves many of us in overspecialized callings from becoming mere automatons.

The increasing poverty of modern employments in elements which stimulate the instincts accounts for the amazing growth in our time of the passion of recreation. What the "stale" worker covets is not *rest*; else why not lounge away his holiday on his back porch? Nor is *change of activity* all he craves; else why does not the hotel clerk spend his vacation as stevedore, the physician as teamster or piano-mover? If it is relaxation he is after, why does not the tired brain-worker spend his summer holidays in gymnasium, bowling alley, and shooting gallery? No, what ails the slave of desk and clock, of client and customer, is what ails the horse pawing in his stall, the wolf restlessly pacing his cage. *He needs experience that will feed his famishing instincts.* Hence the great recipe for recreation is "back to nature"—raw nature, so rich in simple and racially familiar things! In a wilderness trip the novice thinks it is the big outstanding features that do him good—canoe paddling, swimming, fishing, or shooting rapids. The fact is, most of his benefit comes from a lot of little things which he scarcely notices, but which register in his subconscious mind. Such are green-clad hills, tossing seas of verdure, the sparkle of sunlight on stirring leaves and rippling water, the mirror magic of still lakes, the sighing in pine tops, the shadow dance of sun falling through foliage, the challenge of precipitous trails, the sense of little peering

furry creatures all about one. Thick woods, darkness, and queer night noises stir the wild self in us just enough to afford a delicious tingle. The fact that after a night passed close to lapping waves or a waterfall one wakes fresher than after a still night may mean that the subconscious self was recognizing grateful sounds. Anyhow, from sleep in a hotel near to train sheds or to a busy traffic corner one wakes weary.

The priceless gift a summer camp offers to city boys is not fresh air and exercise so much as the stimulating of deep-seated instincts, which find no outlet in the regular round of home, school, and street. It is full of challenge to the prying, roving, hunting, collecting, contriving, and vying tendencies. The woods appeal to youth as catnip does to cats. "I have often," says Professor Puffer, "in taking cross-country walks with boys attempted to switch out from among the trees into open meadows or pasture land to save distance. Over and over again, however, have the boys protested. 'No, don't. Let's stay in the woods,' they have entreated."

One who watches himself closely learns that very little things get a rise out of his original nature. Plodding through a drizzle is depressing, but there is exhilaration in battling a gusty rainstorm or a blizzard. The canoeist notices that adverse waves by rousing his fighting instinct are easier to paddle against than a current or a head wind. The angler cares more for fly-casting and bait-casting than for still-fishing, because a thrill in him answers the "strike" of the fish. This is why he seeks out the "gamy" species, that seize his lure with a rush and fight hard when hooked.

Experienced campers know better than to let a "tenderfoot" party turn in without a camp fire. The brightening of spirits in the circle as the genial blaze gnaws its way out of the heaped wood has its root doubtless in the selection that went on among the earlier generations of our race. Those who did not respond to the fire's magic wandered too far into the dark and were pounced on. We are descended from such as took comfort in fire at night and kept close to the red protector.

The reason why tenting life out of doors has a mysterious healing power over mental disorders is that it teems with experiences which are as grateful to the subconscious as soft fur is to the skin.

Its rehearsal of activities of body and states of mind belonging to the childhood of our race rests the overtaxed higher cerebral centers. This no doubt accounts for the marked improvement in the state of epileptics, insane, and incorrigibles when removed from almshouses and jails to a farm colony well situated with reference to water, groves, and hills. It is significant that to sick minds the greatest benefit comes, not just from working out of doors—fencing or digging—but from farming, gardening, and caring for animals.

Like townspeople, the dwellers on lonely farms suffer from “balked disposition,” but their trouble comes from quite another quarter. In the open country what irks is not so much lack of the stimuli nature provides as lack of society. Gray days of toil, alone or with grave, still elders, are zestless to the child of a race that went always in bands. The farm youth craves elbow touch, eye-beam, voices, the call of his kind, concerted rhythmic response. After an autumn of hard work amid sere stalks and under leaden skies, his thrills will come, not from “camping out,” but from social “bee,” dance, charivari, or religious revival. Foot-loose, he will seek the city, bathe himself in throngs, and make up for months of flatness by a prolonged spree in motion-film theaters, vaudeville, and amusement parks.

Certain vices get much of their power from men’s desperate desire to escape from the humdrum of a life bare of recreation. Says the Philippine Opium Commission:

What people on earth are so . . . destitute of amusement as the Chinese, both rich and poor? There are no outdoor games in China, or, indeed, any games except in a gambling sense. Absolute dullness and dreariness seem to prevail everywhere. As these two demons drive the Caucasian to drink, so they drive the Chinese to opium. As an individual may by habitual toil and attention to business become incapable of amusement, so a race of almost incredible antiquity, which has toiled for millenniums, may likewise reach a point in its development where the faculty of being amused has atrophied and disappeared, so that all that remains is the desire to spend leisure in placidity. And nothing contributes so much to this as opium.

Alcoholism by no means indicates either a physiological demand for stimulant or a specific craving for strong drink. Many hope for relief from the mental depression produced by living against

the native grain. What a far cry from the running, striking, throwing, hunting, stalking, and fighting nature fitted us for to the few endlessly repeated movements of the modern factory operative! The discipline, the monotony, the meaninglessness of one's minute fragment of a task, the dreary surroundings in industrial towns, make life more irksome than ever before it has been for free workers. The series—herdsman, husbandman, craftsman, artisan—constitutes a curve *away from* the instinctive which finds its climax in the machine-tender. With little in it to rouse the impulses of rivalry, curiosity, or constructiveness, the day's work is done under steady strain. One drives through it only for the Saturday pay check. "Why do you get drunk?" a Chicago stock-yards worker was asked. "Because that's the quickest way out of Packing-town," was the reply. Small wonder that people who scrape pig bristles sixty hours a week and live in mean, dingy little houses, looking out across stretches of mud, cinders, or car tracks, should seek the ruddy glow of saloon good-fellowship and drink to forget.

Recreation, then, there must be, if people gone stale are not to poison themselves with drugs. But what shall serve for recreation is far from being a private question. Still less can it be left to the conscience of commercial amusement caterers. Because they touch and awaken the instincts, and because the instincts may call out the jungle self, amusements have always given rise to many of the chief ethical problems in society. The experience of civilized peoples with certain sports which rouse the aboriginal instincts of combat make it clear that we have here to do with a very serious matter.

The bloody spectacles of fighting men and beasts provided by the ruling class of Rome as a means of contenting the populace eventually struck root in all parts of the Empire save Palestine, and were for four hundred years a master-influence upon the ancient world. The recent surmise that they were "*not a brutalizing agency, but an afterglow of brutality left behind*" is confuted by the fact that they were not Latin in origin, but Etruscan, and that five centuries elapsed after the founding of the city before Rome saw them. At first such spectacles were occasional, but in time a veritable mania for them grew up, and the acquired love of blood-



shed was perpetuated from age to age. When Antiochus introduced the games into Syria, the first impression was one of disgust, but repetition changed the feeling into approval. Greece, superior in civilization, long resisted bloody spectacles and only the rabble ever became fond of them. To the last the educated unanimously condemned them.

The moral harm wrought by the arena baffles measurement, but it is significant that the Roman world remained hard and ruthless until Stoicism, and, later, Christianity, brought a spirit of mildness, and that none of its peoples experienced the gradual genial humanization that had occurred in the development of the Greeks.

That morally the bullfight has been a millstone tied about the neck of the Spaniards, Mexicans, and Peruvians is doubted by no one who has ever seen it. In the beginning it was a knightly sport, but with the coming on of generations which had drunk in the gory sights of the bullring almost with their mother's milk it degenerated. Today the onlooking multitude shows a quite depraved taste for seeing living flesh torn and blood gush out. The riding out of blindfolded old horses for the bull to vent his rage upon is obviously no part of the fight, but a sop to the bloodthirst of the crowd. The devotees of the bullfight insist that it fosters "manliness," but what is the manliness of the spectators who from their safety cry "Nearer!" to the *matador*, compared with that of the aviator or mountain climber who seeks his thrills by risking *his own* life, not that of another? Noting the children about the bullring, noting how even the boys in the street play bull and *matador*, one perceives why the history of so fine a strain as the Celt-Iberian is stained with mistreatment of domestic animals, the use of torture, cruelty to the fallen foe, and ruthlessness to political adversaries. A few years ago a Mexican governor addressed his people with the prophetic words: "Diaz is old. When he is gone, what will happen? I say as long as your recreation centers in the bullfight, so long as your little boys and mothers with babes at breast flock to these places, so long will Mexico be a land of revolutions. While the strong hand of Diaz still supports you, commence now to find a substitute in character-building recreation."

The prize ring differs from the arena in that the combatants are free men and their weapons not deadly. It appeals, however, to instincts as primitive as those which found satisfaction in the duels of gladiators. President G. Stanley Hall testifies:

In witnessing great pugilistic contests, which I sometimes permit myself to do as a student of human nature, the three surprises are: first, my own tense and absorbing interest that makes me want to shout and yell like a wild Indian as the rest do and perhaps leap into the ring; second, a kind of cathartic refreshment after the brainstorm, which like a thunderstorm clears the air; and third, that I see so many other respectable people there whom I know, but do not wish me to recognize them.

Refreshment from indulgence in old prehistoric states of mind there is, no doubt, but, were the prize ring open to children and youth, it would brutalize as the bullring has brutalized. What keeps pugilistic encounters from becoming rougher than they actually are appears to be, not the squeamishness of their devotees, but the sentiment of the outside public. The disgust of "fight fans" at a "tame" bout, their joy in "bare knuckles" and a fight "to the finish," indicate that but for society's veto a revival of gladiatorial combats would be a money-making venture in the great cities of today.

In the conflict type of recreation it makes a great difference morally whether a man gets the sharp tang of excitement by struggling himself or by watching others struggle. In the latter case he is a spectator, not a player, and has his elation without effort, pain, or danger. But so fine a thing ought not to be had on such easy terms. It is the man willing to put on the gloves and "take punishment" who has earned the right to enjoy the boxing of others. The chief reason why national sport degenerates is that, after people have become lazy and soft, they will not make their own fun, but have it catered, allowing to be spilled the cheap blood of beasts, slaves, criminals, captives, gladiators and *toreadors*, because they are too canny to risk their own skins.

The parasitic onlooker is to blame for the monstrous and demoralizing excess that presently shows itself in sport. The amateur sportsman is held back from such excess by the price he pays in danger and pain. The spectator knows no such curb;

dulled by familiarity, he demands sights ever more sensational and shocking to thrill his jaded nerves. Thus in the course of two centuries the Roman populace became gluttons for blood. At a single spectacle Trajan produced eleven thousand animals, while Claudius staged a sea fight in which nineteen thousand gladiators butchered one another till the waters of the lake were red!

Among us, multitudes who want, not to *play*, but to *be amused*, participate by inner imitation in the contests of professionals when they should be at games of their own. One who hunts, fishes, canoes, rows, sails, climbs, golfs, or skis, despises these flabby athletes by proxy. The "fan" who is nothing else is a hanger-on of the play of others. Least athletic of men, he never plays at anything himself but is content to be a mere spectacle-hunter. His crowd hysteria and partisanship disgust true sportsmen and throw sport into the hands of those who play for the money there is in it.

Quite apart from its lure of easy gain, gambling fascinates because its conflict situations appeal to the same instinct which is excited in boat race or ball game, in business competition or stock speculation. Its reaction, unlike that from watching physical combat, is not brutalizing. Society bans the gamester, whose zest is but that of the business man or sportsman, because he creates no values and breaks down good habits. Once the something-for-nothing itch gets into its blood a people loses heart for industry and saving, while all the parasitisms—theft, swindling, fraud, extortion, graft, vice-catering, imposture—flourish with a tropical luxuriance.

A host of diversions appeal openly or subtly to the very old and masterful mating instinct. Promiscuous sensual dancing, "girl" shows, risqué plays, the nude in art, and the daring in literature allure because they are saturated with sex suggestion. Great cities and old civilizations become corrupt because they so abound in means of titillating desire. The fact that man is the only species possessing arts for whetting sex appetite justifies, in respect to the relations between the sexes, a discipline and a surveillance to which no other creature needs submit. No doubt if amusement caterers were given a perfectly free course—no check

from police or public opinion, from current standards of decency, or from the steady influence of elders—sensuality would be excited to such a pitch that marriage and home would be broken down and race continuance imperiled.

For dealing with demoralizing sports and amusements there are three policies—viz., *suppression*, *substitution*, and *sublimation*.

No policy has been so thoroughly tried out as *suppression*. Religion naturally dreads whatever unleashes the beast in man and hence has taken a critical attitude toward recreations. The early Christians turned with horror from the arena. The mediaeval church sought to solve the problem of popular recreation by herself providing pageants, plays, festivals, and the like means of brightening the drab existence of the masses. The Puritans uprooted the old loose communal diversions of “merrie” England, closed the playhouses, and destroyed the people’s pleasure fields. Macaulay’s gibe that they stopped bear-baiting, “not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators,” will equally fit the foes of bullfighting, cockfighting, or any other demoralizing sport, for they are more shocked by the lowering of men than the suffering of animals. Various Protestant groups long ago took alarm at the moral flare-back from recreations and proceeded to lay their ban on gambling, dancing, the theater, the circus, and the novel.

Such a yoke may be assumed by the elect, but it cannot be imposed on the people as a whole. Even the religious groups have had to give up much of their old-time strictness. Instead of recreation being cut down in volume, there is every reason to anticipate that it will greatly expand. As our daily occupations become more specialized, more methodical, more routinary, fall completely under “scientific management,” and lose much of their creative gladness, as the hotter pace of modern life brings upon the higher brain centers a constant and severe strain which must be offset by longer intervals of rest and relaxation, the demand for recreation will become more general, more imperious, and more justified.

The *substitution* policy goes on the theory that for every low and demoralizing sport some fine and wholesome substitute may

be found which will in the end prove just as satisfying. This in turn rests on the psychological principle that each of our tendencies may be brought into play by a variety of situations. Detective stories and Boy Scout maneuvers afford gratification to the hiding and hunting instincts, as well as playing "It" or "I spy." Marching, crew rowing, and choral singing give the pleasure of rhythm no less than seesaw and dancing. Our political contests certainly stir and refresh us, and if the Romans had stayed democratic, as the Athenians did, they would have hankered less for bloody games. Patriotic festivals, political barbecues, and ecstatic religious revivals are as truly emotional "sprees" as prize fights and lynchings, besides being innocent.

The experience of the last fifteen years opens a wonderful vista for substitution in the sphere of sports. The thirty-three hundred supervised playgrounds in the United States, looked after by eight thousand professional leaders and supervisors, have weaned great numbers of lads from mischief-making, broken up "tough" gangs, and overcome slum tendencies. Athletic contests have driven the bullfight from Hispanic peoples under American influence. The Filipinos are finding their excitement about the baseball diamond rather than the cockpit: the chocolate-colored Malay lads took to playing our national game and talking its slang before they were able to speak English. Under the lead of American officials the wild Igorrotes of Luzon have learned to divert themselves with athletic contests and dancing instead of head-hunting. At first the savage bystanders would stone the too-skilful pitcher of a visiting team and match games often broke up in a free fight; but the onlooking Americans and the police checked such tendencies and now the Igorrotes are said to be good sportsmen. In China, as opium smoking declines, sport comes in with a rush and thousands of Chinese make long journeys by train in order to attend the national meets. In the light of experience it does not seem rash to anticipate that bullfight and cockfight, opium debauch and vinous "spree," every ghoulish orgy of religious fanaticism and every obscene or bloody rite in Asiatic temples, may be displaced in a generation or two by ball games and track meets, folk-dancing and symbolic pageants, if only in public supervised recreation

centers all the children are bred to merry and wholesome plays.

*Sublimation* occurs when the original demands of our natures accept purely imaginative gratification or become blent with culture elements. This leads to the enjoyment of art, which is quite a different outlet from play. Music touches and rouses instinct after instinct, but not in a way to threaten the poise of the civilized man. In the theater our emotions are fed with the situations presented by love, war, diplomacy, crime, adventure, and politics. The flight instinct, after childhood quite suppressed in real life, causes us to hang breathlessly upon the motion-picture representation of the hunted animal or the hunted man. The maternal instinct is stirred by the representation of the waif, the hapless victim, the stricken hero. The well-made plot of novel or drama is a challenge to the instinct of curiosity, like a puzzle or a riddle. The fighting spirit is never neglected, for, in the language of President Hall, "Every drama and romance pivots on a conflict ending in the triumph of one and the defeat of the other force or person, and the zest of it all is that the conflict is more intense and the issues more clearly drawn and palpable than in real life about us."

There are signs that society, which has recently been converted to the policy of making provision for play, may yet be brought to do something for music and art. Municipal bands and orchestras are not uncommon, and the Puritan horror of the theater is nearly gone. Educators recognize the socializing power of good drama, and a stage is often provided in the newer school buildings. The social settlements have taken a hand in producing good plays, and their successors, the public social centers, may offset the evil tendencies of the commercial theater.

Perhaps half a century hence it will be as much a matter of course for the community to maintain public playground, recreation field, and stage as now it is a matter of course for it to maintain a public school. For if it is wise for society to care to feed the intellect, why is it not equally wise to provide the agencies which tend to preserve a balance between primitive cravings and the humane and social feelings?